MUTINY

A PAPER OF ANARCHISTIC IDEAS & ACTIONS #65 MAY/JUNE 2012

China's counterinsurgency policies and how to respond

The Industrial Workers of the World: Then and Now

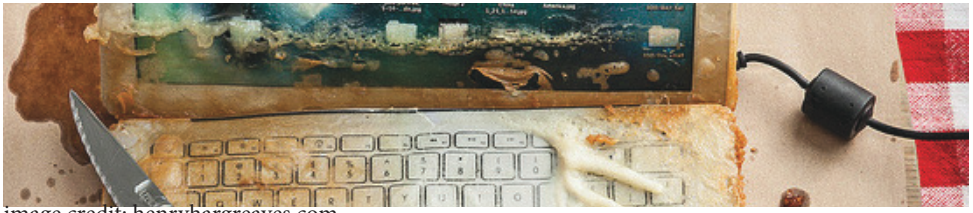
Review of the workers' struggle conference

Hospital workers take action in Greece

Interview on 'radical parenting'

Cops at Sydney Uni

FREE ZINE



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Editorial

This issue of Mutiny features a number of articles around work and class. While capital increasingly affects all aspects of our lives, the significance of work as a site of antagonism remains. We hope that these articles provide inspiration and also fuel critical reflection about organising around these areas.

We publish a fascinating article on political developments in China. It analyses changes over the last three decades and hones in on the changing composition of the working class, the state's attempt to prevent revolt, and what all of this might mean for struggle. Greece has been a centre of proletarian class activity in recent years, and this issue features notes from a talk given a doctor from Kilkis hospital, which was recently occupied and run by its workers.

More locally, in light of the attempt to revive the Industrial Workers of the World in Australia, Humphrey McQueen discusses the history of this union, drawing out lessons from its past that may be helpful for current workplace militants. From Sydney, there is a review of a recent conference that focused on workers' struggle and a report on a sit-in against job cuts at Sydney Uni that was broken up by police violence.

Our series of interviews with other publications continues as well. We talk to Lara Daley, who puts out a 'radical parenting' zine called Building Blocs. Lara talks about the importance of both a politics of care and of multigenerational spaces instead of age-segregated ones. She contrasts the idea of a 'community-in-construction' and a 'movement-in-emergence' to the common reference to an already existing movement or 'radical community', which can obscure problems within activist groups and networks. We hope that this encourages readers to not only relate these themes to parenting, but to consider their importance as part of the broader project of building radicalism in Australia and overseas.

Love and solidarity,
Mutiny Zine Editors (L-Dog, Syzygy, Blackbeard, Tea with Alice, Dumpstered Twin)

To all of our subscribers, we would like to apologise for our inconsistency in sending out your copies of Mutiny Zine over the past 3 issues. We have had considerable trouble with our printing facilities (mainly the inability to get new ink for our richo), causing us to rely heavily on commercial printing at an unsustainable cost to ourselves. We are currently still attempting to fix this situation. Hopefully we will be back on track very soon but until then we ask that you bear with us. We will be sending as many zines out as possible when we can. In the meantime, printable copies are available at our website if anyone has access to printing to get in touch, and say we will prioritise sending zines to people without access to computers/ infoshops which get the zine. As always we're contactable at mutineers [at] graffiti.net

Cops on campus: the sit-in at Sydney Uni against the cuts

Aimee

I was standing in the doorway to the Darlington Centre with the others, and we were surrounded by police. No one had been removed yet. Then an officer close to me turned to his superior and said 'should we start getting rid of them now?'. A second later, I was lifted off the ground by my backpack, without warning, carried painfully around the side of the building, and then thrown face first into a pile of wood chips. On the video it looks like I'm struggling, but I can tell you that I was so shocked and in so much pain and had so little control over what was happening to my body, that resisting wasn't even on the cards. However, If I'd have had enough presence of mind and control over my body to resist, then I don't think it would have been wrong of me at all.

In the days following an attempted sit-in at Sydney University, which was brutally shut down by riot police, social media websites, campus newspapers and the mainstream media have consistently called on the students and workers involved to justify their 'violent' and 'extreme' action. So many times I have had to explain myself to people who say "I oppose the staff cuts, but I don't support your tactics. Surely, all we need to do is sit down and talk with the Vice Chancellor, to write some letters, to make our argument heard so that those in power can hear both sides and have the opportunity to make a fair decision etc." I can think of times in my life when I might have said the same thing, after all, we're all rational individuals... right?

My problem with this argument is twofold 1) the VC and the University management are implicated in, and privileged by, a hierarchical system which means that it is impossible to sit down and reason with them, person to person.They must act in the interests of a profitable university, and this means prioritising a business model which reduces labour costs and commodifies the university space into an attractive educational product. 2) Not only do we enter into negotiations on unequal footing, but we begin from entirely different ideological frames of reference. We oppose the commodification and marketisation of education, and want a university which is controlled democratically by workers, students and academics, in the interests of workers, students and academics. As such, it's not really a matter of debating University management over the most *reasonable* course of action, but of challenging the foundational assumptions which are guiding their decision to cut jobs.

The way I see it, hundreds of people's livelihoods are at stake because the VC and university management are intent on cutting costs and running university departments at a profit, applying retrospective and blindly quantitative criteria

(a key factor in deciding which staff would be targeted was the number of works that they had recently published, so an academic who had put out 4 peer-reviewed papers might be seen as performing 'better' than someone who is a fantastic teacher but has published less - eds) to cut a whole load of jobs, while at the same time building fancy new infrastructure that will attract more 'customers' and corporate sponsorship. All of the proper channels have been exhausted, hundreds of letters sent, petitions signed, media generated, submissions made etc. The majority of staff and students have expressed their opposition, yet the VC refuses to engage at all. So, when the consultation period is a sham, and when there's obviously no democratic process to follow, what do you do?

It is clear to me that a man in a position of power, earning a lot more than anyone else employed at the uni, is making a decision to take away livelihoods from hundreds of people, despite opposition, and without considering other options. He is allowed to ruin lives without breaking the law, and without being held to account. He's doing violence to people, yet it is sanctioned and normalised through hierarchical economic and managerial systems. How do we stand up to this, if all of the processes have failed us? We tried to make our opposition felt by staging a sit-in, and for this we got dragged and thrown and put in wrist locks by police. And for what? For 'trespassing' on a university that we attend? For potentially causing damage to a university building by standing in a doorway? Let's be clear that those with a monopoly on violence that day were the police and the VC.

When I arrived at the rally that day, I overheard a lot of people who were shocked and uncomfortable about the fact that the Vice Chancellor had invited the police and the riot squad on to campus. After all, we're all good, legitimate citizens, we're students and academics, not crazy protestors. In an effort to undermine the campaigning and actions of student and staff, the VC had even sent an email to all staff, claiming that the police were there to deal with 'outside agitators' who were behind all of that bad, illegitimate protesting. However, what was made clear to us that day was that the police came to protect power, money and the status quo, and that any one who challenged the legitimacy of that power would find themselves on the receiving end of state violence.

It's a difficult thing for some people to come to terms with, that the police aren't *reasonable,* that the law is primarily in place to protect private interests, and that by standing up for what you think is right, you'll be portrayed as a raving lunatic. Many university students are being groomed for positions of power in the legal system and the public and private sector. Because of this, we are invested in the illusion of the autonomous and rational liberal subject. This subject can simply walk into a meeting and be heard, can reason with other educated people about how the world should be and often fetishizes moderation and the 'middle ground' as somehow more truthful and 'unbiased' than commitments based on the values we actually hold. Hopefully this experience was a wake-up call.

Left Dead-End Street vs. Destructive Critique

China's Counterinsurgency Policies and How to Respond

By friends of gongchao.org

In spring 2010, workers at a Honda plant in the industrial city of Foshan, Guangdong went on strike. They overcame the split between permanent employees and technical student interns and brought Honda's entire production in China to a halt. The transnational company was forced to increase workers' wages by more than 30 percent. This conflict triggered a strike wave across several industries and regions that lasted about two months. In autumn 2011, the inhabitants of Wukan, Guangdong took control of their rural town and kicked out local party and government staff. Corrupt officials had sold off land without proper compensation for the peasants. After locals fought off the police and staged large assemblies in the town center for several weeks, the government accepted an investigation into the sale of land and elections of a new local government.

These are prominent examples of the success and failure of the Chinese government's counterinsurgency policies. Social unrest has been increasing since the mid-1990s, involving all dangerous classes – peasants, urban workers, and migrant workers. Land conflicts, strikes, and riots in the countryside as well as the cities could be harbingers of an explosion of struggles that might blow up the existing socioeconomic power structures. However, the counterinsurgency policies were successful because the explosion has not yet taken place, despite the tension and frictions. Social unrest has put immense pressure on the regime but has not loosened its grip on power. The new ruling class of old Party officials and their Capitalist offspring [Chinese capitalists are often the children of Party officials-eds.] have not only modernized and strengthened the anti-uprising apparatus, but also created a range of institutions to mediate, pacify, and integrate social conflicts.

While the explosion has not yet happened it still might. The reasons why neither repression nor integration – nor a certain improvement in living conditions – have successfully blown out the flame of revolt can be read as being due to a list of social horrors: a huge income gap, displacements, low wages, long working hours, lack of work safety with millions of dead or maimed workers, lack of an effective social insurance system, mass lay-offs, old-age poverty, widespread corruption, and embezzlement – each a reason to keep on fighting. There are two questions that proletarians, peasants, and all indignad@s in China and elsewhere eventually have to answer: since capitalism reproduces these social horrors, how do we get rid of it and what comes afterwards?

No Communism Before, Or No Communism No More?

In 1978, China's Communist Party (CP) regime set out on a long march from capitalist state socialism to state socialist capitalism. The old socialist system had combined the modernist belief in industrial (Taylorist, Fordist) development with land reform, mass health care and welfare on the one hand, and urban-rural Apartheid, nationalism, militarism, authoritarianism, and patriarchy on the other hand. The political, economic, and social crises of state socialism in the 1960s and 1970s forced the regime into trial and error reforms, without it knowing where it would end up. The process can be called the three long decades of reform and development.

In the first long decade from 1978 to 1992, the CP and state structures began to cooperate with transnational capital to change the conditions of capital accumulation and the reproduction of labor power. Foreign capital was allowed to pour into the country. The Chinese state provided the conditions for profitable industrialization by, for instance, loosening tight migration policies and thereby opening the supply of new labor power for the newly formed Special Economic Zones. The first cracks began to emerge in the socialist Iron Rice Bowl – a set of welfare measures available to a minority of mostly urban workers. Moreover, the Communist Party started to eliminate its former class struggle rhetoric, beginning to use reactionary concepts of social stratification while keeping other elements of the Maoist "social glue", being Chinese nationalism and repression. Meanwhile, an intensified commodification of labor, economic crises, and increased work pressure lead to popular discontent in many parts of the country that culminated in the Tian'anmen Movement in 1989. Contrary to the common view, this was not just a student and pro-democracy movement but a massive popular uprising against social conditions and the regime. The crackdown on the movement with tens of thousands of casualties, death penalties, and arrests, weakened popular opposition and opened the way for even harsher attacks on the working-class.

In the second long decade from 1992 to 2002, the state restructured the state economy by privatising or closing small or medium sized state companies and transforming the bigger ones into profit-oriented state trusts. Millions of workers were made redundant, many of whom could not find jobs in the new private sector and formed the new urban unemployed and poor. This destruction of the Iron Rice Bowl in the mid and late 1990s led to massive struggles of the urban working class, that could not stop the restructuring but slowed it down and won monetary concessions. Meanwhile, the inflow of transnational capital into China's Eastern provinces exploded. In the course of the nineties, the larger part of the young rural population moved to the cities to work in the factories, on construction sites, and in urban services. The regime realized that it needed to modernise forms of repression and conflict resolution. While creating a big counterinsurgency police force, it

also introduced a new framework of labour laws and regulations for the mediation of labour conflicts.

The third long decade began around 2002. The CP allowed the new elite to join it, changing it into a communist party of capitalists. The new class composition, involving an increasing number of migrant workers, began to take shape in the increasing number of struggles. The second generation of migrant workers coming to the cities in the 2000s has learned from the experience of their older migrating fellow villagers or family members. They want to stay in the cities, they want to have a share of the wealth they produce, and they are prepared to fight for it. They are considered part of the "rural population" and have to find ways to bypass the still existing hukou regime that gives them an insecure social status similar to "temporary" migrants in Western countries. Furthermore, during the 2000s the countryside has seen countless struggles of peasants against the dispossession of their plots, land-theft, industrial pollution, and government corruption. The increased number of struggles has forced the regime to engage in 'fire-fighter' policies. In cases of large scale proletarian or peasant struggles it sends not just anti-riot police but also government officials with suitcases of money. Again, new laws have been introduced, and new government agencies set up to channel social grievances, supported by ridiculous Confucian state propaganda about a "harmonious society" – which translates into a threat to all who "break" social peace and challenge the rule of the Communist Party.

The Fourth Long Decade or the Beginning of the End?

In a few years we might see 2010 as the beginning of a fourth long decade of reforms. The global crisis and increasing social struggles world-wide have changed the context. In China, social crises and conflicts might open up chances for change. The Honda strike and subsequent strike wave together with a series of suicides at the gigantic electronics producer Foxconn have had a great impact on the public debate on labor unrest and social justice within China. While some proletarians can use strikes as a means of struggle (as they work in industrial units with hundreds or thousands of others with similar interests), others continue to use popular uprisings and riots as a means to express their anger and a form of "collective bargaining by riot". The increasing amount of autonomous forms of organising among workers and peasants has raised the spectre of revolt and lead to a renewed debate within the power structures about how to deal with social pressure from below.

Meanwhile, interrelated with the intensified class antagonism, many of the institutions underpinning Chinese society have undergone dramatic changes since the 1980s. This has led to a crisis of social reproduction and gender relations as well as resulting in (women's) struggles around the organisation of reproduction and social freedom. Migration, the One Child Policy and the latent disintegration of the biological family has led to the changing status of women in the families and in society and a deep "care crisis".

As usual, capital uses the desires of the oppressed for improved living conditions to implement new forms of control and exploitation. In this case many women take the opportunities migration offers to escape patriarchal control and oppression in the villages, only to end up in a new industrial world of exploitation under a different patriarchal regime. In combination with the commodification and rising costs of domestic labor, health care, and education, this has produced enormous social misery and deepened existential fears. Workers in China are forced to improve their personal suzhi (social quality or human capital) in order to improve their chances on the labor market and to fulfill the requirements of reproduction, while long working hours and long-distance migration have resulted in dramatic "time crises" in workers' everyday lives. Further social tensions have arisen from the simultaneous existence of unemployment, precarity, exploitation, ongoing racist discrimination against migrants and so-called minorities, and ageist industrial policies that favor young labor forces.

The state knows that it has to keep on orchestrating these tensions and invent and use social technologies to weaken social revolts. It is trying to adapt the mechanisms of conflict regulation to the new labor relations. This includes a further modernization of the migration regime (hukou), new labor regulations, and the rigid channeling of conflicts through state agencies and state unions. Above all, the regime is using its new economic power and imperial role to try and

ensure economic growth – despite the catastrophic effects of this on nature and humans. It has to make sure to meet the self-proclaimed 8 percent growth rate so it can create enough jobs for old and new proletarians and thereby prevent further social turmoil. It also needs this growth to uphold the banner of the capitalist dream of continuous material improvements and the promise of a better personal life for the suppressed class that it keeps at work, in chains and in good spirits.

What we see in this possible fourth phase of reforms is a self proclaimed market-socialist state that still focuses on capitalist growth and modernization and now considers the "privatization" of land in the countryside and the final industrialization of agriculture. This is the last major reform that could complete the proletarianization of rural populations by taking away their (limited) means of subsistence. This state is mixing strategies of capitalist exploitation and workfare with a different set of social techniques of repressive tolerance than proletarians in "Western" states have to deal with. If we look at this from a perspective of social revolution and liberation, the repressive parts of China's counterinsurgency policies, and the capitalist fixes (forms of restructuring aimed at weakening the workers – like capital relocation, automation, division of workforces as along gender lines, etc) are obvious targets of struggle. Meanwhile, other targets are obscured by the diverging interests of left-wing actors and ideologies.

Left Dead-end Street vs. Destructive Critique

The spread of struggle in China could open up new social perspectives of change. Ten years ago many struggles were based on kinship forms of organization and limited to cellular mobilizations in one company or neighborhood. Within a decade, a new layer of worker activists, as well as so-called citizen lawyers and citizen journalists have emerged, and peer and interest groups have supplemented the kinship networks. While still limited by the hukou division (between rural and non-rural workers) and the labor and community hierarchies reflected in the strike committees and self-organized initiatives, it is evident that a new class (re)composition creates astonishing social dynamics: strike waves, copycat and domino resistance from the grassroots, debates on conditions, struggles, strategies of organising and change in the digital cloud of chat-rooms and websites as well as along the physical routes of migration and within proletarian communities. This has effects on rural, migrant and urban working classes, including the so-called ants (yizu), educated but precarious white-collar workers who hoped for a career and end up in low-skilled jobs. The Chinese regime fears that this new under-class might forge coalitions with the blue and pink-collar proletarians and undermine the current order – as during the Arab Rebellions.

Meanwhile, what can be broadly defined as the "left" is small and fragmented in China. Large parts are influenced by different interpretations

of Maoism, supporting workers' struggles while sticking to party concepts and nationalism. Activist NGOs, many of them supported by foundations, unions, or churches from Hong Kong or elsewhere in the West, oscillate between social work and state-oriented reformism, but also grassroots activism and workers' empowerment. The spread of neo-Marxian and feminist ideas as well as a new interest in workers' struggles and the desire to participate among younger academic circles are promising signs. However, this small "left" has to continuously deal with censorship, repression, and threats by the security forces on the one hand, and on the other hand, a strong pressure from within the state and party apparatus to follow the line of "social harmony" and help transform class power into a blunt weapon of social partnership.

An example of left-wing illusions and lobby politics is the debate on unions. Unions are one possible tool to control and pacify workers' struggles. These can represent workers' material interests against the interest of capital and the state, but only within certain systemic limits and by accepting capitalist mechanisms – otherwise they would have to break out of their union role. In China, the unions are still mass organizations of the CP and are directly dependent on state financial support and government directives. They oppose all strikes and attack independent forms of worker organising. That does not prevent left-wing advocates of militant or reformist unionism – Maoist or not – to demand "reform" of the state unions so they can fulfill the function of proper unions against capital and the state. Other left-wing protagonists favor the setting up of Western-type independent unions, counting on them to act in favor of workers' interests, thereby ignoring the long history of union compromise and the weakening of workers' struggles by such unions in countries around the globe.

Rather than providing the right "left-wing" repair-kit for the disintegrating capitalist social structure, greasing the cogs of arbitration and pacification of social struggles, or even reinventing the myth of a "workers' state", the left should further engage in and support the 'class making' processes by breaking state censorship and spreading more information about struggles in China and beyond, and by refraining from its constructive role within the limits of capitalism and forging tools of destructive critique. This form of critique has to look through state propaganda as well as the fog around capitalist exploitation and shed light on struggles that can open perspectives beyond capitalism. Concrete methods should include at least two elements – traces of which can be found throughout the history of revolutionary politics in China: the analysis of the processes of class (re) composition from the perspective of proletarians and other oppressed people; and variations of conricerca (co-research), the attempt through militant inquiry to break down the divisions between proletarians, activists, and so-called intellectuals both within China and in relation to proletarians and activists elsewhere – as part of a new organization from below.

Globalized Perspective

This is, of course, not just a challenge for the left in and around China, but around the world. It is amazing how – after decades of failed projects of left-wing parties, national liberation, and state socialism or social democracy – a large part of the left still holds on to the old leftist narrative of state building, party-based parliamentarism, paternalism, and power politics – even in a time of global crisis and misery that has lead to unprecedented social anger and rebellion.

This is the time to attack the cheap-labor model, ideas of social partnership and welfare state compromises. The left has to leave behind concepts of consumer boycotts, corporate responsibility, and left-wing lobbyism and engage in non-paternalistic solidarity across physical and virtual borders. The outdated inter-nationalism needs to be replaced by a perspective of a global working class. That class is still split along the North-South divide, by national labor markets (as well as a sexist and racist division of labor within these markets) and along the global migration chains, but the global wave of struggles opens a chance for attacking and abolishing these borders from below.

Global capital went to China, forming a coalition with a party state that tried to survive and defend its rule. Conflict followed, starting in the Special Economic Zones along China's East Coast, and now following the routes of capital relocation into Central and Western China. If the pressure from below forces the regime to make more concessions – as in the past few years – and if the global crisis intensifies and rampages through China, the social struggles there might return to the global level, merge with social revolts elsewhere, and mess up capitalist projects of crisis management. Social struggles often have no political demands – in China as well as elsewhere – but if they form a mass movement they can overstretch the capitalist net of exploitation and repression, and open the way for a world beyond capitalist relations. This process might have just started, and for sure the struggles in China will play a key role in determining its direction and outcome.

Let's join in.

Against austerity: Greece info share and solidarity night

These are some notes on an info-share night that a few comrades organised on the austerity measures & debt 'crisis' in Greece, held on March 29th 2012, in Northcote, Melbourne. On the night comrades in the antagonist movement in Greece spoke to us live via Skype. The speakers were a hospital worker from the workers collective occupation / self-management of Kilkis general hospital, and a speaker who is a member of ESE (a Greek anarchist syndicalist organisation). There was also a rembetiko band (Greek 'outlaw' folk), and some anarchist poetry during the night. All funds raised are going to prison solidarity initiatives for imprisoned anarchist comrades in Greece. These notes summarise what Leta from Kilkis general hospital said.

Leta (I learned her first name only) is a doctor at the hospital of Kilkis, and is also union president. She spoke of the workers' struggles in Greece and of the occupation of Kilkis hospital. Kilkis hospital is in a country town in Northern Greece. The hospital has been under workers' control since early February of this year (the occupation has since ended – eds)

Leta started by giving us an overview of the national health system. In the 80's in Greece the PASOK (so- called) socialist government came into power after the dictatorship and the interim military rule that was in place after that. This was a time of huge societal change. Initially the public health care system worked well; it was free and so was accessible. But the government did not fund the system well enough and the system degraded. The system now has fallen in to what Leta described as a catastrophe.

Leta described the public health system as being very thin on numbers of doctors and other workers, and therefore is unable to be as good as it was before. Doctors that may have been receiving 1000 Euros per month are now on 4 or 9 Euros per month, or are even receiving a 170 Euro fee instead of being paid. Some workers have gone up to one year without pay. All staff are incredibly overworked due to trying to meet the demands of public health requirements despite their small numbers. This, Leta said "led us towards making something like a revolution."

Coming up with hospital fees is impossible for those who are in poverty due to diminishing salaries and taxes . Many people in Greece are losing jobs and not getting paid for the work that they are doing, just like the hospital workers, so poverty is increasingly widespread Access to treatment is very costly; people have to pay an admittance fee and then everything that comes after that also costs money. Leta listed some examples of medical fees for patients: 5 Euros for admittance, 30 Euros for a blood test, 900 Euros for a birth, 7000 Euros for a car-related or other accident. The hospitals are supposed to be working as some kind of business that is able to pay off the debt to the

IMF (international monetary fund). But people who aren't being paid aren't able, and as the hospital workers have shown us, also aren't willing, to fuel and fund this neoliberalism that is costing peoples' lives. The Troika, the controlling power over Greece at present, consists of three bodies: The IMF, the European central bank and the European Union. Whichever government comes into powerwill have to answer to the Troika debts.

From the general assemblies of Kilkis

The workers of Kilkis hospital are in full disagreement with the Greek state's attitudes towards public health over the last two years. The workers care about health and want to treat people, and they believe that their occupation demonstrates this. The decisions on tactics from the workers assembly were:

- To occupy the hospital and operate it by themselves
- To give free treatments
- To occupy/take control of the administration (so the state can't close down the hospital)

Decisions about austerity measures made by the government and the Troika on the 12th of February 2012 were met with revolt across the county. The day and night of the 12th saw mass insurrections, which lasted into the following days. Many workplaces were occupied, and the other forms of resistance such as wildcat strikes and rioting still occur. Three hospitals were occupied and there have been strikes and demonstrations with involvement from across the public health sector. Today, even though the occupations in hospitals other than Kilkis have ended, workers in hospitals continue to struggle through acts such as refusing orders from the health ministry to stop treating undocumented immigrant people. They do this at this time when violence by fascists and the state toward immigrant people is increasing.

Leta described the assembly's voice as showing a unanimous desire to show people that this is how we make a revolution; this is the road to revolution. The workers of Kilkis occupied the office of the director because these offices are the closest to the government orders. They believe in occupying everything because the workers know better. They are linking up with other popular assemblies, base unions and small organised struggles outside of the control of the constitutional left and the constitutional trade unions. Leta said "this was more than an ordinary struggle and the government was panicked."

The workers of Kilkis want to struggle against the government's hegemony. They believe that in this time of occupation and in the solidarity of the workers they have found political equality between the workers and patients, and a practical democracy. They want to be in cooperation with other sectors and other hospitals because they didn't just occupy their hospital as a temporary statement: they want to overthrow the junta and they wish to be a part of a revolution. A hospital is a workplace that when occupied and under workers' control makes a strong revolutionary example, as all revolutionaries would include hospitals as an essential part of revolution.

The health ministry began to undermine the occupation and the workers by sending workers to fill positions in other parts of the country, a popular method used by the authorities. At the time of the interview with Leta the workers were waiting to see what would come in terms of these types of government orders. In June it is expected that the health sector will become a total disaster, with plans to close down several hospitals and to fire thousands of workers. (This is happening at a time when the state builds new detention centres).

Leta sees what's happening to Greece as a political genocide, a straight-up genocide and economic genocide. The hospital workers take the actions that they do because they see that situation that has happened in Greece has also happened in many countries in Europe, and is about to happen in many other countries . In Leta's words, "capitalism must die and democracy needs to live."

Questions and conclusion

Somebody in the audience who was a nurse asked about the hospital's need for pharmaceutical drugs. They asked if this was a concern for Leta, and did they have the drugs they needed during the occupation.

Leta explained that yes, it is very difficult and yes, the problem is very big and that many things have to change. She said that the government has run down the health system and so supplies are not what they should be. The government has even bought drugs that are no good for anybody- one of the drugs causes some kind of hepatitis. The doctors try to only give the drugs that they were prescribing before and refuse to prescribe dangerous drugs, so the government has been forced to take these medications back.

Another question asked was around mental health, about the climbing rate of suicide and depression, and about the fact that many people can't afford antidepressants that they were prescribed earlier. Leta confirmed that this is true, there are suicides as well as other problems such as children living in states of malnutrition. She said that this is the worst kind of violence, and that we are pushed in these ways also towards revolution.

Unfortunately I can't speak much about the other speaker, there is a video at the link below of Leta's interview but there is not one for the second half of the night yet, and I don't feel confident to go from my memory. I remember that he expressed that the despite all of the occupations and other forms of struggle in Greece that workers are still reluctant to take action. This was relevant to the political climate here in Australia and was difficult to digest after listening to such strong and inspiring words from hospital worker and occupier Leta. But perhaps Leta would agree with these words from the second speaker, as what she sees as needing to happen is far more total than what has already been accomplished.

Video of Leta's interview: http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xq6rig_interview-with-doctor-leta-from-the-workers-occupation-of-kilkis-hospital-greece-part-2-of-2_news.

Interview about Building Blocs: parenting, movement and little folk

Mutiny Zine's **Syzygy** recently interviewed **Lara Daley**, who has self-published a number of works on 'radical parenting', including the compilation zine *Building Blocs: parenting, movement and little folk*. A third issue of *Building Blocs* has just been completed. Lara also runs the zine distribution project Tricycle Zine Distro and some of this work, amongst other material, is available at tricyclezinedistro.org . You can contact Lara at tricyclezinedistro(at)riseup.net

For those who aren't familiar with the *Building Blocs* zine and your work more generally, perhaps you can outline the aim of these projects and why you started organising them? What do you mean by the term 'radical parenting'?

Lara: The kind of political work or organising you can do when you become a parent or caregiver changes for many people, particularly those taking on the bulk of the care work. This can be an isolating experience, both socially and politically. When I had R I moved to the Pacific Islands with my co-parent for a while and was separated from my previous social and political support networks. I then relied on connections I made with other anarchist/anti-authoritarian parents online who I felt I could connect with politically and in our approach to parenting, whom also often shared a similar history of organising and politics.

I wanted to parent in a way that reflected an individual and collective anti-authoritarian and anarchist politics and I felt that a support network of people and information could help myself and other caregivers to do this. One thing I thought might contribute to this was to start an ongoing compilation zine to encourage people to write as a political act, to share their experiences and build collective knowledge, and a zine-distro to disseminate this and any other zines and resources I could find. This was an activity that I could practically manage from my position of isolation as a new parent, where going to meetings or getting arrested for an action weren't such viable options. Through these projects I also wanted to reach out to childfree folk and encourage their support for parents, caregivers and kids in radical spaces and to work towards building a multigenerational movement that is more attuned with the challenges of parents/caregivers and views kids as valuable to a movement in their own right.

What I mean when I use the term "radical parenting" is any kind of parenting and caregiving approach that is anti-authoritarian in orientation and values trust, respect, autonomy, difference, combating oppression, and is located within desire and action for social transformation. I think of radical parenting as evolving, both as a collective project and on a personal level as parents/caregivers. It's experimental and process-oriented, as would be any other working out of how we build a society that supports all of us, particularly those with different needs, such as kids.

Unfortunately, I don't actually like the term itself very much. The reason I use "radical parenting", is that I found it already in common use among other anarchist/anti-authoritarian parents and caregivers. I wanted to be able to connect *Building Blocs* and Tricycle Zine Distro with what was already happening in this area. I have also noticed the term in use in Australia. There is a group that meets at Loophole in Melbourne under this banner. Also, I couldn't come up with anything better. I've heard one parent use "counter-hegemonic parenting", which is interesting in that it suggests parenting as a revolutionary strategy. However, I think that term might need even more explanation than "radical parenting".

Coming back to the concept of 'radical parenting', could you talk about the problems or limitations with this term and the related idea of a 'radical community'? For instance, one article in *Building Blocs* notes that the term 'radical community' feels "too limiting, too self-consciously about reproducing a one dimensional and self-serving identity instead of grappling with the complex, shifting and imperfect relations that everybody must negotiate". Do you have any responses to critiques like this?

Lara: I would agree with them. I think much of what gets referred to as "community" in radical circles is really a scene or a network. As a parent or caregiver, many of whom are noticeably absent in such "radical communities" you really feel this – the rhetoric of community support without a lot of practical support or infrastructure to give substance to a "radical community".

A notion of radical community that I think is worth-while, is a community-in-construction, which emphasises that community doesn't pre-exist, it is in a process of becoming. I want to see this community valuing parents/caregivers and their participation on their own terms, rather than dictating how one participates in the "community" or is "radical". Also, a radical community would be constructed in a collective manner, not simply as the aggregate of individual actions towards some sort of shared entity.

The term radical parenting is most definitely problematic. It, like any parenting approach, can all too easily be conceived of in a limited, singular way and

mobilised as "*the right* way" or "*the* radical way". There is definitely scope for this term to produce a politics focused on a self-serving "radical" identity. However, there are folks interested in contributing to the substance of what gets known as "radical parenting" in a way that will emphasise the openness, the experimental, the imperfect, and the contradictions. It is in those places that we can learn and build collective knowledge.

Terms like "radical parenting" and "radical community's" only real use is to help bring us together around parenting, caregiving and movement building and to try to do them better or differently. It will inevitably limit things. So then, maybe we need to throw it away and define something new that will be more useful to our struggles.

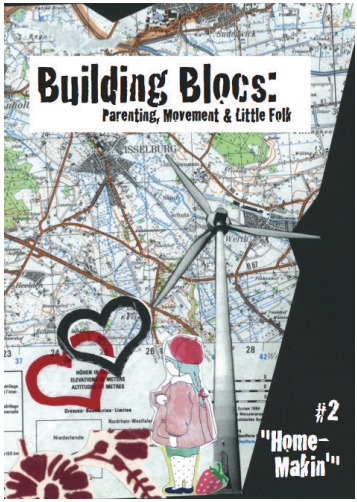
Other than that, raising a kid is bloody hard and full of contradictions, and as the author of that piece wrote, aboutgrappling with complex and shifting relations. I think it is these moments that force us to rethink our politics and organising, which is actually the next theme for *Building Blocs* – "politics reborn". Although, unlike the theme suggests "politics reborn" isn't one moment, but rather many moments as your politics go through a continual rebirth as a parent/caregiver.

Sounds like it will be great! I also really liked how many of the different articles in *Building Blocs* stress the importance of collective responsibility for care-work like parenting, and the need to develop a politics around this together. Consequently, *Building Blocs* puts effort into distinguishing between the task of building a movement, something that can be helped through supporting the involvement of parents in political spaces, versus the failings of 'activism' or scenes. For instance, one piece by you astutely draws out some of the problematic aspects of 'activism', arguing that the very term activist "values particular forms of political work over others, encourages judging people as 'activist' enough, idealises a group of people as superior or separate to the rest of the population and makes working toward social change a specialist activity. Why do you think that radicals have made these mistakes associated with 'activism'? Do you have any other ideas on the relationship between care-work, collective responsibility and movement that you'd like to offer?

Lara: Firstly, I should qualify my experiences of activism and radicals. The majority of spaces I've been involved in have been affinity-based organising that have flowed on from, or, spilled over from uni student organising. These spaces have been inhabited by predominantly white, twenty-something folk.

I think radicals can also fall into an identity-centred (as in "radical" identity) praxis, which in a part may come from defining ourselves by what we are against, more so than what we are trying to create, which produces a radicalism limited

by what constitutes that identity. Caregivers then tend to be primarily seen as valuable to a radical spaces if participating in prescribed childfree-like ways.



Our society is also a very age segregated one, and to an extent radical spaces reflect that, which leaves folks out of touch with the realities and experiences of those not present, hence it is acceptable to use derogatory terms like, “breeder” to describe people with kids. I think it also lends itself to a tendency to reflect wider society’s individualisation of care responsibility and care labour. The parents/caregivers who struggle to be present are blamed for their absence. And when they are present, the burden is often on the caregiver – to leave the meeting with a bored or “noisy” child, to baby-proof the space, to care for/entertain the child, to keep the child out after bedtime and deal with a tired kid the next day, etc.

When we think of ourselves as a movement in-existence, rather than a movement that’s emergent, then we can mistakenly assume that support already exists and doesn’t need to be put in place. A child- tolerant space, which characterises almost all spaces I’ve experienced, are welcoming in theory of kids and their caregivers – kids can be present in meeting spaces, you can bring your kids to an event, you can live in an activist house. However, when it comes to changing the physical or social infrastructure to make it easier for caregivers to participate, that requires much more of all of us. This is where there is a distinction between child-tolerant spaces and child-friendly ones and also I believe a barrier to building an intergenerational movement.

Building a movement takes the long-term view of change and single-issue activism can produce a much shorter-term view. I think in the context of movement building it is imperative to support lifetimes of political work, through creating the infrastructure and care options necessary to integrate kids and caregivers into political activities. Putting this in practice is a much better position to engage parents/caregivers from.

I think the idea of a politics of care has emerged from feminist critiques and movements, so the general focus of this politics on critiquing and replacing gendered systems of labour is very much to be expected. Certainly this critique has been and still is incredibly valuable. However I think that maybe this politics

can go beyond gender, and to some extent 'radical parenting' is a step in this direction. Solidarity work with arrestees might be another example of a politics of care that is less specifically tied to gender. It seems to me that such a politics (broadly defined) can and should be an essential part of reproducing and strengthening radical or revolutionary movements. Any thoughts on this?

Yes, I think radical parenting, particularly in its collective expressions and in valuing kids as the movement participants of today as much as those of tomorrow, goes beyond critiquing and addressing gendered systems of labour. However, I think there is still a lot of work to be done on this front. At the family level (and I use that term in its very broadest sense), I think caring can still be a very gendered experience in terms of labour, as well as other aspects of caregiving that involve challenging the reproduction and enforcement of gender norms in children. In addition, parenting styles which are often more compatible with a radical politics in terms of being based on respect and trust rather than control, such as attachment parenting, can both challenge and strengthen gendered systems of labour in caregiving.

Certainly a politics of care should be an essential part of reproducing and strengthening a movement. Not only as it facilitates the participation of folks who have caring responsibilities, but also as it takes a long-term, lifetime view of political work, which enables us to prioritise supporting each other through both planned and unplanned change in our lives, which will inevitably affect our political activity. It can also forge an opening for participating in a multiplicity of ways, rather than creating hierarchies of legitimate political activity. A politics of care also has the potential to support the presence of kids as movement participants. Kids can bring a great amount of joy, creativity and imagination to a movement, something, which is vital to creating alternative political imaginaries and inspiring hope.

Further to this, care work, both paid and unpaid makes up a significant portion of economic and social labour, so we need to be experimenting with different modes of caring. A politics of care should allow us to construct alternative ways of caring and create the movement infrastructure necessary to caring.

I also liked the intermingling of the 'local' and the 'global' in *Building Blocs*, with pieces from Australia side-by-side with those discussing experiences in places like Egypt and Chiapas. Can you talk about the role of this international content in the zine?

Whilst one of my hopes for the zine is that it will help strengthen support and create networks in Australia for parents and caregivers, I think it's important that the zine attempts to be global in scope. There is much that can be learnt

from how people are doing caring and politics in other parts of the world. For example, folks based in US radical circles have been grappling with these kinds of questions and putting stuff out there on it for a while now. China Martens, a single mama has done a huge amount of work in this area, from starting one of the first parenting zines in the US in the 80s to today with a now grown kid being involved in a childcare collective (kidzcitybaltimore.blogspot.com). China, together with Victoria Law, has also been working on the *Don't Leave Your Friends Behind* project, a series of workshops and zines culminating in the forthcoming book from PM press *Don't Leave Your Friends Behind: concrete ways to support families in social justice movements and communities*. There are also other great parenting zines circulating, folks running kid streams at conferences, and childcare collectives in various places round the US. I hope that Building Blocs provides one forum to share some of these experiences and knowledge across the continents.

I also believe there is much to learn from cultural-political contexts less similar to our own, such as in Chiapas, where, as the authors of the article on Zapatista communities in issue #1 pointed out children are integrated into daily life and struggle.

Finally, it is important to challenge the notion that caregivers, particularly mothers and children have no agency and to make more visible their contributions to radical or revolutionary movements and contexts.

I was excited to be able to include the piece from a mama in Egypt in issue #2 at the time of the mass demonstrations in Tahrir Square and the ousting of president Hosni Mubarak. It would be great to have a follow up on the ongoing struggles there.

Any things you'd like to improve on in *Building Blocs*? Any plans for the future?

I would love to have even more people contributing, particularly to the regular sections like the reviews and feature projects. As well as having more people with older or grown-up kids and childfree folk contributing. I am also sure there is much going on close to home that I haven't connected with yet. I hope people will see this interview and get in touch!

I recently did a workshop on valuing and supporting the participation of parents, caregivers and kids at the Occupy Sydney Free School. I'd love to dedicate some time to improving this and running it elsewhere, or even creating a workshop resource that others could use to use themselves in their own spaces.

Thanks heaps for sharing your ideas Lara!

The following article looks at the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) in terms of its legacy, its platform and its potential for organising and building current workers struggles. An IWW branch in Sydney has been meeting since early this year. It has acted as a meeting place for radicals from different workplaces. Several members have been involved in the struggle against proposed job cuts at Sydney Uni (see article 'cops on campus' in this issue), participating in on-the-ground organising with general staff as well as publishing a newsletter and participating in regular Staff and Student Assemblies. IWW members were also involved in the Workers Struggle conference (see review in this issue), and held a successful social night and fundraiser

IWW members in Sydney show a conscious appreciation of the danger of becoming what some have termed 'the IWW historical appreciation society'. The union is useful to us only in so much as it offers us ways to organise to win our demands at work and in society more broadly, and build relationships of solidarity and struggle.

Sydney IWW meetings are held on the 3rd Saturday of every month from 3-5pm at the Petersham Bowling Club. Contact iww-sydney-gmb@iww.org.au - L Dog, editor and IWW member.

Given the parlous condition of the organised labour movement, it is hardly surprising that attempts are underway to revive the IWW (Wobblies – Industrial Workers of the World). My impulse is to send off the annual dues for much the same reasons as I belong to the Society for the Study of Labour History and the National Museum of Labour, that is, for old times sake. Yet there is much more to the IWW than nostalgia. Its past lives in our present and we should weave the finest achievements of the Wobblies into our future. The part of the IWW that could not be killed goes on to inspire.

The ashes of Joe Hill

Let's start from three interlocked expressions of the IWW's approach to educating, organising and agitating: its humour, its slogans and its songs. In comparison, today's grouplets, including the IWW, seem po-faced.

The first aspect is the power of IWW satire, sarcasm and irony. We remember jokes and repeat them in ways we don't with the best argued ideas. On slogans, 'Fast Workers Die Young' is still doing the rounds when not many Marxist scholars can define universal labour-time. Tom Barker was gaoled in 1915 for a headline in Direct Action to counter wartime recruiting: 'Your Country Needs You: Workers, Follow Your Masters.' Similarly, we remember snatches of IWW songs

because they are witty and because we sing them together. The whole of a May Day march should be a massed choir. 'Bump me into parliament' to 'Pie in the Sky' circulated long after speeches and manifestos were forgotten.

The second weapon in the Wobblies' armoury was 'Propaganda by deed'. My father and his workmates at a Brisbane tannery joined a union in 1917 after a Canadian seaman Wobbly king-hit the foreman. The workers had never seen anyone stand up to the boss. Of course, the effectiveness of that blow was increased because it took place during a revolutionary upsurge around the world.

Propaganda by deed is not just the one-off punch but involves building up strength in the workplace by initiating a campaign for a winnable demand that has broad support, for a shithouse or potable water on site. That is the way to recruit and to keep those who join active once they pay their union dues.

Parliamentary cretinism

Before turning critical of the IWW, there is one issue on which its program is 300 percent correct. No affiliation of unions with parliamentary cretins, that is, otherwise intelligent people who think that making a speech or passing a law changes reality.

Union officials waste more than half of their time in factional battles about the ALP. These diversions from the main game are not as simple as lining up for a berth in parliament. The prime temptation used to be a job in the arbitration system – aptly identified as the union officials' slice of the state. Officials are duchessed by being asked for advice, appointed to boards and sent on overseas delegations. They are flattered by a kit and caboodle of perks. The problem is that they cannot do their job for their members if they stand aside from inquiries into health and safety, precarious employment or skills training. They must walk on two legs by keeping up mass campaigns around these issues and refusing to get enmeshed in 'commercial-in-confidence' hearings.

The wrong-headedness of union officials being the last rusted-on ALP supporters was evident when the Construction and General Division of the CFMEU backed the ALP for Melbourne in 2010 against Adam Bandt (Greens candidate- eds.). The officials had seen Killard's tough-cop performance at the Brisbane ACTU Congress in support of the ABCC. Backing even the most progressive ALP candidate is a waste of time, money and effort unless you have a passion for being kicked in the teeth. No ALP parliamentarian is ever going to break caucus solidarity and back Bandt's motion to abolish the ABCC.

However, spurning the ALP does not solve the political question since the capitalist class can exist only because of its control of the state. The state is the party for all capitalists. The political question is not solved by abstention. The IWW had split over this matter shortly after its formation.

Nor can we give full-throated endorsement to the abandonment of the Leninist party, despite the multitude

of crimes and errors flowing from that model. Moreover, the reason for holding back is a Leninist one: our class enemy has a party of its own and it is called the state. The state organises capital and disorganises labour. Whatever else the capitalist state in Australia might be these days, it remains organised violence raised to an obligatory norm. On that point, Marx, Engels, Bukharin, Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Mao and Chomsky agree. To accept the irrelevance of the Leninist party for Australia in 2012 does not get over Lenin's identification of the state as organised violence. In our case, that violence is more often latent than actualised as it was under the Czars. Yet, not only is the violent core of the state unchanged, that force is several times more intense with modern weaponry and surveillance. Those forces cannot be overcome by workplace militancy.

'Our class enemy has a party of its own and it is called the state'

Union bureaucrats?

From one other point in the IWW program, there can be no dissent: all officials must be elected by the membership. However, we need to consider how those elections should be arranged. The following comments are drawn from researching the BLF – which recruited the nomadic and less-skilled workers among whom the IWW had most influence.

> Annual elections sucked energy out of that union – the organisers and their critics ended up doing little beyond contesting the next poll. Making officials 'subject to recall by majority vote' has its place, but that process too can be used by scabs to derail struggle.

> Although all positions must be subject to regular election, unions also need to make short-term appointments to train and test people. A number of BLs gave away their position as a paid organiser as it was too hard psychologically when they encountered anti-union attitudes on the jobs, or found the tasks beyond their administrative abilities, their literacy and numeracy.

> Keeping accurate records is essential and taxing. Democracy depends on an efficient bureaucracy to track the money.

> Three-year tenure is not long enough to get on top of the job. Rule one of historical materialism is that we learn by doing. Effective delegates and officials are made in action, not born. Victorian BLF officials such as Malone, Karslake and Wallace were as solid on the day they retired as on the day they began. Fred Thomas in NSW was rotten from start to finish. [People often cite Jack Mundey as someone who stepped down to rejoin BLs on the job. Jack often left for work but, as his wife noted, he rarely got there – being waylaid by a TV crew.]

> A union must do everything it can to keep full-time officials on the job some of the time. This is simpler to achieve in some sectors than others. For instance, the need for stand-by teachers and nurses makes it easier for AEU or ANF officials to spend a day a week in classrooms or wards - as should school principals and matrons.

> This rule applies to research officers. A crucial part of their research has to be experiencing in their daily practices what members live out hour-by-hour.

Graduates need to take a post-grad year on the job before being appointed to the back office, and to take refresher courses.
> Recognise the distinctions between paid officials and job delegates. Being a job delegate is the hardest job in the movement especially now when they have so little room to move within the law. Annual elections, recall and three-year maximum terms are unlikely to develop an effective body of job reps.
> Circumstances differ between types of work. Metal shops used to have lifelong employment and their delegate structures were powerful inside the unions and against the boss. These days there is more casualisation. Hence, no blanket or permanent answer exists to the questions of how to organise around the jobs.
> Salaries for officials. The Communist rule was that no one got more than the average for the most skilled members. Anyone who can't live on $120,000 should change their manner of living.

A word is called for about the IWW membership dues. The maximum dues now expected from the best-paid worker are $180 a year, whereas most unions levy one percent. The average IWW dues would not have provided one week's strike pay of $100 for the Baiada strikers. The gap between the IWW dues and workers' needs is a reminder that the appeal of the IWW is to certain precepts and its organs will not provide the seed that will germinate into the mass organisation it was before the 1930s.

The Wheel

A hundred years ago, the IWW adopted a plan for One Big Union. The workforce was divided into six departments which were in turn split into as many as nine sub-groups. The way forward was illustrated by a Wheel concocted by Father Haggerty. His schema looks as impenetrable as the intricate plan for One Big Union adopted in Australia in 1919. How many rank-and-filers ever absorbed its significance for their struggles?

The Wheel was utopian in 1912 and is even more so today. It summons up the Phalansteries conceived by the French utopian Charles Fourier (1772-1837). It comes from outside Australia, outside the workforce and outside current actualities. Even if you brought Haggerty's Wheel up to date in terms of the structure of contemporary workforces with their much larger service sectors, the circles and spokes would still be utopian in the sense of being a blueprint for a future society that plops out of someone's head and not out of social action.

All attempts to construct socialism prove that only those who are building that future can draft the floor plans. In doing so, workers must fail and stumble. No model can protect us from unknown unknowns. That is why Marx and Engels said almost nothing about what a socialist society would be like, and still less about communism. The IWW Wheel is a denial of all the Wobblies stood for in basing their practice on learning by doing.

Such models are like the one imposed from the outside as Strategic Unionism at the 1987 ACTU Congress. That there was a need to gather together miniscule unions was one thing. The

pursuit of cross-industry bodies such as the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union was another matter entirely. Its four divisions continue to go their own ways - as do the State branches within each division. One bad result of the amalgamations was that union leaders were removed even further from the needs of their members.

The Ego and the Self

Far more disturbing than the Wheel is the slogan on the back-cover of the reprint of the IWW pamphlet from a hundred years ago. 'IWW' is now made to stand for 'I WILL WIN'. This rewrite of the initials is a retreat from collective action and Kropotkin's mutual aid into bourgeois individualism. It's bad enough when the Canberra Labor Club promotes itself with the slogan 'It's all about YOU", instead of 'about US'. The fact that admirers of the IWW could make the same mistake is a mark of how much needs to be done to reclaim the socialist project.

The best of the IWW experience will contribute to that remaking to the extent that its promoters avoid romanticism and piety about the Wobblies' past and adopt a self-critical stance towards the limits to their own role in coming struggles. Those cautions apply to us all.

When all this is said and done, we can recognise that the itch to revive the IWW is spurred on by revulsion at the mess and muddle that the organs of labour have become: the ALP as an Anti-Labour Party; the strategic bankruptcy of the ACTU since the disaster of the Accord process; the tame-cat tactics of most unions as their leaders attempted to ward off shrinking membership by dangling free movie tickets before recruits; the recruitment of recent undergraduates with next-to-no workplace experience as organisers; and the carbuncle of corruption throughout the NSW Right, which burst in case of the Health Services Employees Union.

> 'the task is to combine the opportunities for audacity with patient rebuilding brick by brick'

On top of these burdens from within the movement, working people confront aggression from the boss class and its state apparatuses being driven to extremes by the global economic catastrophe in the accumulation of capital.

The temptation to leap over these realities is as understandable as it is perilous. Nothing can be wished out of existence, no attack defeated by sloganeering against bureaucrats, no evils eradicated by fantasising about some noble past, no ground reclaimed by mindless militancy. As was the case when the Wobblies were at their most effective a hundred years ago, the task is to combine the opportunities for audacity with patient rebuilding brick by brick. Since the educator always needs to be educated, the relevance of the above comments will be enriched by criticisms of them drawn from the experience of many activists. The benefits from the legacy of the IWW will be decided in practice informed by continuing investigation.

Review: The Workers' Struggle: a conference

The Workers' struggle: a conference was held on the 28th and 29th of April at Jura Books in Sydney. Over the two days a series of discussions took place between a small but enthusiastic group, focused on issues and problems to do with workplace organising, developing skills and learning lessons from past experience.

The workshops included: working – the personal story; tradition and history of union organising in Australia; direct action and its fallout; worker self-organisation and Sydney University; the women's union and autonomous struggle and direct unionism.

On Saturday I went to the workshops on 'union organising in Australia' and 'direct action and its fallout'. The first of these opened with a story about attempts to organise a progressive bloc within the union structure as. The speaker is involved in a progressive group within their union, and has challenged union elections. Whilst this ticket didn't win, they did come close. I can't say I was convinced by this strategy for composing political and militant relationships in the workplace. However, the narrative and the discussion were useful, the debate was constructive. These elements of the workshop captured the feeling of the conference: a commitment to talking about different forms of workplace organising, their strengths and limitations, and debate that didn't lose sight of what we had in common.

The discussion 'Direct action and its fallout' was a highlight for me. The speaker gave an overview of three different cases of direct action at work in three different workplaces. The speaker had been involved personally in each of these cases. The narrative here involved examples of work-to-rule action (doing the minimum required by your contract in order to cause a slow-down – eds) to win the award wage, a wildcat strike of cab drivers in the ACT against the racist targeting of workers, and bus driver organising with community/ solidarity groups over pay. There is far too much depth in all of this to go into any detail, so here are just some basic comments.

We often like to talk up direct action and its different manifestations, whether this is sabotage, go-slow, a wildcat strike and so on, but this discussion was important for two reasons. First, the workshop presented three cases of more or less effective self-organised activities. Second, the stories were very honest and realistic, with a focus on the possible negatives associated with direct action that receive very little attention, such as being blacklisted, sacked, having to move cities/ towns, and the breakdown of relationships between groups and individuals. This was not meant to be discouraging, but to present an unavoidable reality that needs to be considered in our organisational efforts. A final element that really came through was what sorts of things happen in carrying out direct actions on the job, and what things are needed to avoid the negative repercussions – or if not avoid these, what is needed so that we can keep on and not burn out, feel isolated, or give up. In each of these cases, it was emphasised that it is very much the cultivation of relationships of trust, respect, intimacy and care that are important. On the one hand, in carrying out these actions, the workers involved confronted and overcame forms of division, racism and sexism as they worked and struggled together. On the other,

it is through knowing that these relationships have been built that when the shit hits the fan, you all can feel it wasn't for nought. I thought it a sobering and inspiring talk and discussion.

Sunday opened with a recount of the dispute at the University of Sydney (where there have been over 340 academic and general staff job cuts proposed by management, what has been involved in the campaign around the cuts, and the efforts of a small group of workers and students (the University Worker and Student Assembly) in organising at the university. As someone involved in this, I found the discussion very useful, but I won't go into it here (Mutiny published a piece on this in issue 64, which is still relevant even though things have changed a little since then).

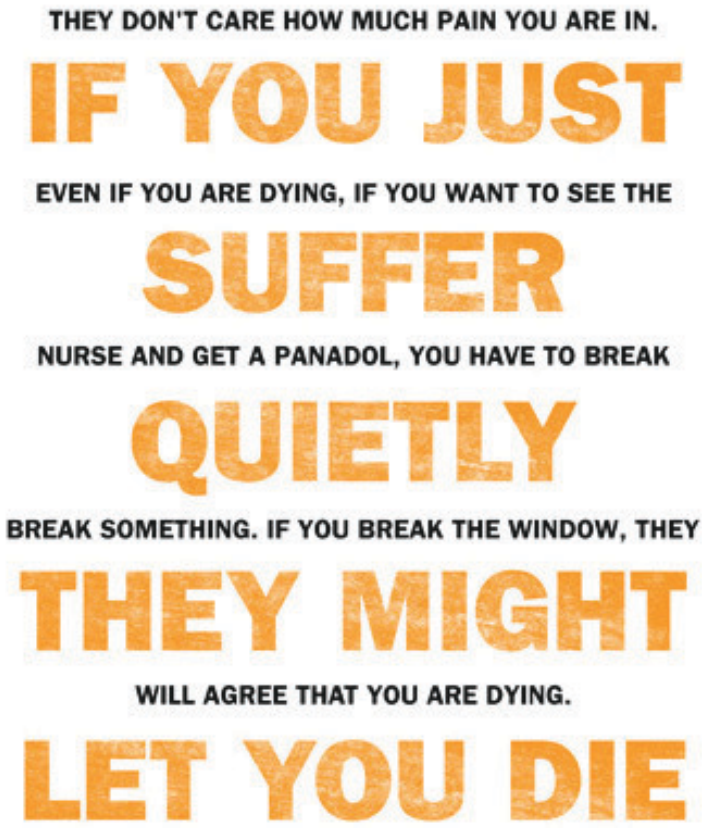
Unfortunately I missed a significant amount of the Women's Union discussion. The parts of it I did see provided some historical context, as well as raising two elements of critique. This critique focused on the masculinist characteristics of what might be called the 'classic' or 'traditional' labour movement, and how this is also expressed in the trade unions. Second, there was discussion of conceptions of 'the worker' that marginalise women, and from this how women might organise autonomously within the class.

The closing discussion on direct unionism looked at an approach to worker organising that does not focus on union elections, labour law, winning union recognition, or on contracts, but rather developing worker militancy by organising direct action grievances on the job and building from there. It took its cue from a paper that can be found here: http://libcom.org/library/direct-unionism-discussion-paper-09052011. In some respects it was an opposing argument in the debate that was opened by Saturday's discussion 'union organising in Australia'.

OK, some last comments. I found the two days very useful. Still, it is worth pointing out that the small numbers of attendees were almost all cis-gendered men. Whilst the content of the discussions was not framed in terms reducible to the mass factory worker as the only true form of worker, perhaps the legacy of this image, and its ongoing reproduction today (even if sometimes unwittingly), is a real limitation. And perhaps this limitation, when crossed with the expectation that these sorts of spaces will inevitably be filled with men who haven't really learnt to listen, is still pushing aside a great number of the actual experiences and realities of what it means to work, to be a worker, involved in the (re) production, circulation and accumulation of capital today.

Finally, and not to minimise the question above, I thought the conference as a whole was a welcome turn in Sydney. Perhaps this reflects more my own interests at the moment, but these kinds of simple yet difficult, modest yet important forms of organising, focusing directly at one of the most unavoidable points of antagonism with capital (but of course, where isn't there antagonism), is something we all need to be better at. It was really more two days of sharing stories and discussions, rather than a conference, but it was well worth it.

waywardwobbly


THEY DON'T CARE HOW MUCH PAIN YOU ARE IN.
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LET YOU DIE

YOU HAVE TO BREAK SOMETHING TO GET SOMETHING DONE.

'we dont cross borders; borders cross us'

Poster from Cross Border Collective series 2012.
Poster design: Hon Boey.
Poster words: Anonymous, formerly incarcerated in Immigration Detention.
Immigration Detention Lesson 1: You Have to Break Something to Get Something Done
www.crossbordersydney.org